

Input from the Kingdom of the Netherlands for the concept papers on the themes of the Ocean Action Panels for the third United Nations Ocean Conference (9-13 June 2025)

The Kingdom of the Netherlands (hereinafter “the Netherlands”) would like to take this opportunity to provide input for the concept papers on the themes of the Ocean Action Panels for the third United Nations Ocean Conference in 2025. Our input sets out our approach to marine policy and ocean governance with practical examples to illustrate, and aims to highlight several topics for discussion by the Ocean Action Panels.

At the end of this text we will also make a proposal for a Dutch expert to participate in the 10 Ocean Action Panels.

Introduction: the Kingdom of the Netherlands on marine policy and ocean governance

The Netherlands fully acknowledges that the world’s seas and ocean contain a wealth of biodiversity and play a vital role in supporting life on earth through the production of oxygen and the absorption of large quantities of heat and carbon emissions. It is therefore our mission to take care of our seas and ocean in order to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of the marine environment, ecosystem and biodiversity.

Our marine policy and ocean governance is framed first and foremost by the relevant international, regional, sectoral and European Union rules and regulations (e.g., the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea), as well as by policy goals such as set out in Sustainable Development Goal 14 and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. In addition to this legal and policy framework, our work is further based on several guiding principles and approaches: the precautionary principle the ecosystem-based approach; integrated ocean governance, based on regional, international, global, and intersectoral cooperation; and the use of the best available science and scientific information, as well as effective stakeholder engagement, for the development of sound, knowledge-driven policy.

Together, these aspects form a framework that guides our mission for a healthy ocean and seas. This framework is further illustrated by our reaction to the Ocean Action Panels.

Panel b. Conserving, sustainably managing and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems including deep-sea ecosystems.

Introduction

The North Sea is one of the most heavily used sea basins in the world. To effectively conserve, manage and restore ecosystems the Netherlands highlights the essential role of Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) in designating Marine Protected Areas (MPA’s) and managing categories of uses of the sea like wind farming, shipping lanes, mining, military exercises etc. As well as effectively execute management plans to protect MPA’s and species, and avoid or mitigate negative effects of human activities through regulation, permitting and innovation. Important is to follow an ecosystem-based approach and apply the precautionary principle while basing decision-making on sound knowledge and stakeholder involvement. The aim should be to reach a sustainable balance between a blue economy and healthy and resilient marine ecosystem with a strong carrying capacity, especially in the context of the growing pressure on the ecosystem caused by climate change. This is why the Netherlands promotes a strong interlinkage between MSP and the strategy towards a sustainable use of the sea to reach a good environmental status, as meant by the European Maritime Spatial Planning Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

In the European part of the Netherlands, several sites of the North Sea have been designated as protected areas within the European Natura2000 network, and the Wadden Sea is recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In the Caribbean parts of the Netherlands, unique ecosystems exist and large parts of the seas are protected. The Saba Bank is recognized as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area by the International Maritime Organization. Since 2023, the territorial waters of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba offer protection for marine mammals and sharks as a protected area, the *Yarari Sanctuary*. Work is also underway to nominate the Bonaire Marine Park as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Panel discussion

This panel discussion could focus discussing the guiding principles for MSP of IOC-UNESCO and the effective management of marine protected areas and what challenges States face in doing so by using examples. Thereby underlining the importance of the goals of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the tools created under the BBNJ Agreement for the establishment of marine protected areas.

Keeping in line with the precautionary principle, we would like to stress that the focus should first and foremost be on *conserving* and *managing* marine and coastal ecosystems. Restoration can be considered to strengthen the carrying capacity and resilience of the ecosystem in the context of growing pressures from human activities and climate change. However in the context of deep-sea ecosystems, we acknowledge that feasibility of restoration is still a topic of debate within the scientific community.

Panel c. Promoting and supporting all forms of cooperation, especially at the regional and subregional level.

Introduction

The Netherlands believes we need a coherent and effective ocean governance framework in order to safeguard the conservation and sustainable use of our ocean and seas, and to adequately protect and preserve the marine environment. This requires the strengthening of existing and the implementation of new legal frameworks, and regional, international and intersectoral cooperation, as well as sufficient funding, capacity-building, and the sharing of knowledge and experience. The Netherlands therefore attaches great importance to the BBNJ Agreement on the global level and to regional organizations such as the OSPAR Regional Sea Convention, which will allow us to develop such a framework for ocean governance. Especially when these organizations cooperate.

Closer to home, the Netherlands together with the eight other North Sea countries aims to provide a regional platform for spatial integration of all uses of the North Sea in the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI). The intention is to do so by making proposals for better aligning maritime spatial planning and effective management processes as well as coordinating sectoral interests across boundaries. This will allow for optimal use of their shared sea and protecting and improving the marine ecosystem of the Greater North Sea.

Panel discussion

The Netherlands believes that this panel discussion should focus on concrete and tangible best practices and lessons learned in situations of cooperation between global, regional, subregional, sectoral frameworks, bodies, and organizations.

An example that could also be discussed is the long-standing cooperation between the countries bordering the North-East Atlantic Ocean in the OSPAR Regional Sea Convention. Regional conventions such as OSPAR have demonstrated their essential role in coordinating the monitoring and assessment of coastal seas and the ocean, while also enhancing the knowledge base necessary for collective decision-making. The discussion could focus on how we can give a political push to make

(sub)regional cooperation also more effective on the level of managing human activities (that is what GNSBI is aiming for),

Additionally, it would be interesting if the panel discussion could focus on the future by discussing the role the BBNJ Agreement can play in achieving the 30 by 30 target as agreed upon under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, as well as the cooperation with other frameworks and bodies required for the successful implementation of the BBNJ Agreement

Panel d. Preventing and significantly reducing marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities.

Introduction

Most of the main sources of marine pollution (chemical, eutrophication, plastics) are well known. Pollution derives from land-based activities and economic activities at sea such as fishing and shipping. As seas and the ocean are globally interlinked, so should be the solutions. This is why pollution should be reduced on the national, regional, and international level. On the regional scale the Netherlands invests in OSPAR and legal frameworks like the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive and Water Framework Directive to set a strong framework for coordinated assessment of the marine environment, threshold levels, and ambitious targets to combat marine pollution and promote a circular economy. This should be linked with ambitious sectoral international policies targeting the main sources, at the same time a creating a level playing field for sustainable economic activity. This approach also drives the Netherlands' global multilateral agenda for UN treaties and sectoral management organizations like the International Maritime Organization, London Convention and Protocol, the International Seabed Authority and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations. On the national level, the Netherlands is committed to implement and enforce (inter)national laws and regulations to combat (marine) pollution.

For example with regards to plastic pollution, at a national level, the Netherlands is committed to the implementation of the EU SUP directive and developed various national programs that focus on tackling marine pollution at its source such as recreational litter on beaches e.g. cigarette butts, litter from fisheries e.g. (parts of) fishing nets and litter that enters the sea via rivers e.g. plastic pellets. At a regional level, the Netherlands plays an active role in the implementation of the OSPAR Regional Action Plan Marine Litter (2022-2030) aimed at tackling fisheries-related litter such as dolly rope, net cuttings and pieces of fishing net. At a global level, the Netherlands is committed to reach an ambitious and effective international plastic treaty that addresses the entire life cycle of plastics aimed at tackling plastic pollution through reduction and re-use.

Panel discussion

The Netherlands believes that this panel discussion should focus on the most polluting sources of marine pollution and the promotion of a circular economy. In that context, innovative cost-efficient solutions can be discussed. This would underline the need of knowledge sharing and capacity building.

Panel e. Leveraging ocean, climate and biodiversity interlinkages.

Introduction

The Netherlands recognizes the ocean-climate-biodiversity nexus: the ocean plays a vital role as a regulator of the planet's climate and temperature, and is the planet's main carbon sink and an important source of its genetic- and biodiversity. We stress the need to identify, assess and address the ocean, climate and biodiversity interlinkages and tipping points. Indeed, none of these issues can be addressed without taking the other two into account. Furthermore, we need to develop measures which reduce and mitigate the impacts of negative feedbacks. Rising seawater temperatures and ocean acidification require addressing as they reduce the effectiveness of the ocean to buffer climate change

and threaten biodiversity. Additionally, climate change can affect global ocean circulation, which has large impacts on the marine environment, sea level, extreme weather events and the climate.

The Paris Agreement aims to limit the rise in global temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius and preferably 1.5 degree. The Netherlands acknowledges the need for negative emissions to achieve these goals and aims to be climate neutral by 2050, and acknowledges the need for negative emissions to achieve this goal. We therefore believe further research is required on technical innovations that artificially enhance the ocean carbon sink, such as ocean alkalisation, ocean fertilisation and direct CO₂ injection in the ocean, not only on their environmental risks, but also their effectiveness in climate mitigation. The Netherlands stresses that the precautionary principle needs to be applied, which requires sufficient research to be done and international rules and regulations to be established before these technologies can be applied on a large scale.

Panel discussion

The ocean-climate nexus is increasingly gaining attention, but the interlinkage with biodiversity is often overlooked. Nonetheless, the loss of biodiversity is worrying. The panel discussion should therefore focus on all three subjects while paying special attention to marine biodiversity. Additionally, the possibilities of technical innovations that artificially enhance the ocean carbon sink can be discussed.

Panel h. Increasing ocean-related scientific cooperation, knowledge, capacity building, marine technology and education to strengthen the science-policy interface for ocean health.

Introduction

The Netherlands underscores the importance of knowledge and evidence-based decision-making as key to sustainable use of the ocean and seas. We specifically recognise the transdisciplinary and transboundary nature of ocean science (including socio-economic aspects). Therefore, a strong international governance on ocean science and the science-policy interface is important.

Additionally, the Netherlands would like to stress the need for more advanced monitoring of the ocean, as the ocean and its challenges are of worldwide importance, but are now covered in scientific uncertainties. These processes include the monitoring of ocean acidification, of changes in vital ocean circulation, the functioning of food webs and the (cumulative) effects of human activities and climate change on them.

Panel discussion

We recognise a fragmentation of organisations, assessments and advice, and are wary of the impact of this fragmentation on the efficiency of the ocean science-policy. The panel discussion should focus on how to strengthen existing regional and global intergovernmental organisations and assessments working on the ocean science-policy interface, instead of focusing on the establishment of new organisations.

Nomination:

Finally, the Netherlands would like to suggest that one of its most eminent experts Mr. Han Dolman (director of the Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research, NIOZ) joins Panel e “Leveraging ocean, climate and biodiversity interlinkages” and/or Panel i “Increasing ocean-related scientific cooperation, knowledge, capacity building, marine technology and education to strengthen the science-policy interface for ocean health”.

We kindly request you to consider his participation.

